

## COINS AND WEIGHTS IN THE VIKING AGE

by Allan Beneke & Peter Gritton.

X2

### Part one

Imagine a busy market, perhaps Birka, Hedeby, Dublin, or closer to home at Yorvik. Imagine the hustle and bustle, the babble of voices haggling over prices, the vendors hawking their wares, and the clink of money changing hands. The coins exchanged were of highly varied origin; English, Islamic, even seven hundred year old Roman coins have been found in Viking treasure hoards. Couple with this the fact that Scandinavia developed its own mints relatively late, in the ninth century in fact, then the simple phrase 'money changing hands' takes on a much more complex meaning.

While barter was certainly an important mode of transaction, the Viking world was aware of the idea that coins have a face-value, a value that is different to their intrinsic worth as precious metal. It would seem though, that it was not normal practice for a Norse trader to recognise face-values. This can be deduced from the archaeological evidence, such as the sets of weights commonly found in male graves at Birka, the great Swedish trading centre of the ninth century. The weights were so small that they must have been used for evaluating tiny quantities of material, which must therefore have been valuable. The presence in the afore mentioned hoards of 'hack' silver, that is coin and other forms of silver cut into smaller weights, would indicate that coinage was regarded as having no more value than its equivalent by weight in silver fashioned in any other way. Silver, it should be said, was the basis of commerce, as gold was too scarce for widespread use, and was generally fashioned into jewellery and the like.

The scales used for weighing silver were of two general types, one with equal arms each supporting a pan, the other having only one pan, and a series of notches to hold counter weights on the other arm. The later variety is known only from Ireland, but the equal armed scales were used throughout the Viking world. They were small, only 12 to 14 centimeters long and some were made to fold neatly into their pans so that they fitted inside a case little bigger than a modern day pocket watch. Careful storage was required for these fragile instruments, as they were carried around the known world by traders.

The weights used to quantify coins, hack silver and the small make-weights clipped off spiral arm rings, came in a variety of styles and materials. Lead weights were found in York, but other metals, clay and pebbles were also used. Metal weights could have an iron core covered in sheet bronze, like those from Birka, to prevent the sort of cheating all merchants try from time to time. Coins were used as weights too, one from a grave in Dover was Roman, with an extra piece riveted to it in order to make up the required weight.

Just as coins were carried in a purse, so were these weights, some-times they were held in different pockets of the same wallet; a particularly fine example found at Birka contained both.

Later in the Viking age a standard system of weights evolved. The smallest element defined was the penningar. In modern terms this would weigh 0.8 grammes, but in the early Middle Ages it was intended to coincide with the silver coin of the same name. In practice though, a distinction was made between counted and weighed penningar due the impurity of the former.

Ten of these weights made up the 8 gramme ertog. According to Brogger the weight derives from the Roman 'tremissis' (one third of a solidus) which also provided the Anglo-Saxon pennyweight.

The eyrir (plural aurar) was composed of three ertogar, and derives from the latin 'aureus' (gold) as in the solidus of Constantine. this was perhaps the contemporary ratio of silver to gold, three to one, three ertogar being one eyrir.

Eight aurar, each of weight 25.5 grammes (although this particular weight seemed to vary later in the Viking age) made up a mork. This was equivalent to 204 grammes, and its first recorded use was in the late ninth century in a treaty between Alfred and Guthrum in England. The mork seems to have been of Scandinavian origin, not a borrowing from Rome.

To summarise this system of weights.

1 mork= 8 aurar= 24 ertogar= 240 penningar.

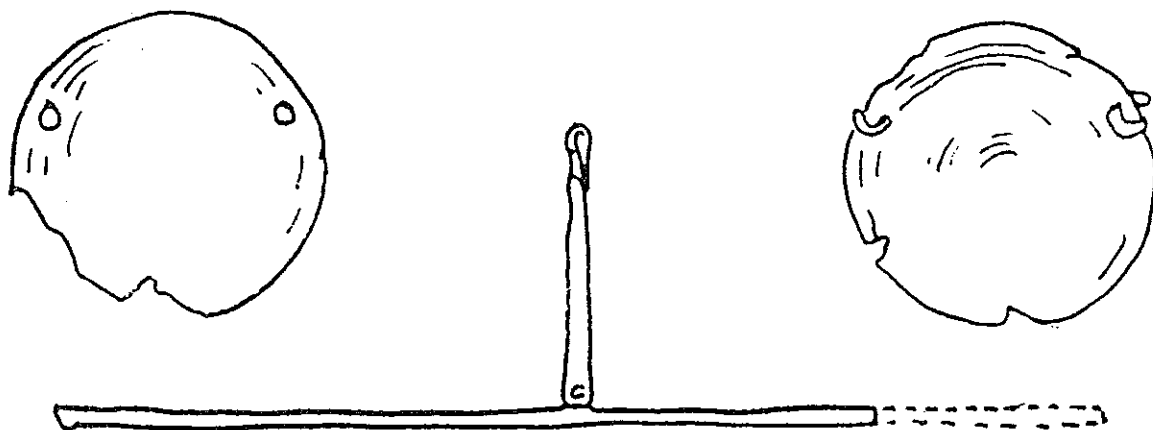
1 mork= 204 grammes.

1 eyrir= 25.5 (later 24.5) grammes.

1 ertog= 8 grammes.

1 penningar= 0.8 grammes.

Rigid equal armed scales, from Dover.

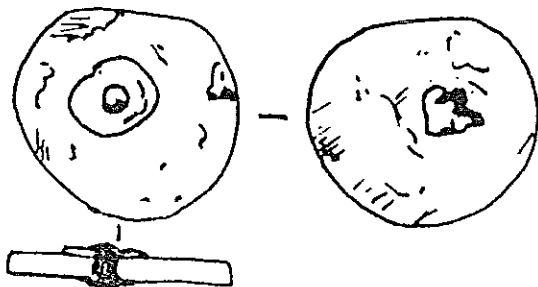


VARIOUS VIKING AGE WEIGHTS.

Weighted Roman, coin, Dover.

Round pebble.

Roman coin.



## TROUSERS X /

by Orm Skoffin.

Trousers are a basic necessity, unless you happen to be a female, and wear skirts, dresses, etc, or even a male transvestite for that matter, and it's amazing how little regard many of us pay to authentic styles. Above the knee, most are quite passable, at the very least, with good tunics, armour and other kit, but the effect is often spoiled by cords, denims, etc, sometimes thinly disguised by fur leg wraps over desert boots, trainers, or even Doc martens.

When taken to task over these, you always hear the same old excuses, "they look fine from a distance, /no one notices/ I reckon I can get away with them, / who gives a damn anyway?"

This is totally the wrong attitude, and if these people really cared about their gear, or, more to the point, about the image of the N.F.P.S, they would make the little extra effort needed to get it right. There are two answers to this problem, first is to look for a pair from commercial sources, in other words, shop around.

Look for a pair made of fairly heavy grade woollen cloth, in a suitable colour. Greys greens and fawns, browns and russets are good choices. Styles of the Viking age varied from fairly tight (thought not as tight as those worn by today's trendys, more like the 'Ski pants' popular in the sixties) to quite baggy, with, perhaps, the norm being much the same as that of today, so you have plenty of scope for choice. As most trousers sold nowadays have what is known as french seams down the outside leg, and these are a fairly modern development, you make like to disguise this by, for instance, overstitching in two ply wool of a matching colour in criss-cross fashion, or whatever. Any turnups or creases will, of course, have to be removed.

It's amazing what you can find if you look around. A friend of mine once bought a pair of perfect trousers from an army surplus store. They were made from heavy, bleached canvas, and were probably ex-navy. He never did get round to dyeing them, as I advised, having a pair of suede pants made up just afterwards, and the canvas ones drifted into the limbo or his spare box. Pity, they were great. The other, and to my mind better way, is, of course, to make a pair. First, of course, get your material. A heavier grade of woollen cloth is better for trousers than that for tunics, or a heavy canvas, if you can get it. Garment leather or suede, of course can be used, but stick to matt finishes, and browns or other natural shades. Leather pants a la Jim Morrison are definit<sup>E</sup>ly not Viking Age!

For a pattern and you need one when making trousers, a commercial home dressmaking one, such as McCall's produce, is ideal, or you can always pick out an old worn pair and use that. Before you cut however, there remains the problem of a fly. Most, if not all, patterns will be geared to zip closure, and if you're taking the trouble to make authentic pants don't spoil them this way. Male anatomy not having changed much in a thousand years, most Viking trousers probably had flies, and closure by either a flap, thongs, or toggles seems pretty likely, see sketch. If you decide on a flap, don't forget to add the extra on to your pattern before cutting out. Sewing can be done with two ply wool, if doing it by hand, as this speeds things up quite a bit.

Another style of trouser wear was fairly similar to seventeenth century 'Dutch Slops'. They were almost certainly influenced by then current Turcic fashions, as seen by Swedish and Gotlandic traders in the East, in the lands of the Bulgars, Khazars, Patzinaks and others (Ibn Fadlan's 'Rus'). They would have been commonest among, possibly, merchants and traders of Swedish origins. For anyone fancying a pair I've included a 17th,C, pattern that is suitable.

These would have been worn with stockings to the knee. Apart from the famous York sock, a few others of Viking age date have come to light, including another from York found at the Walmgate bar at the turn of the century. They were made either by the Sprang or Needlebinding technique, both forerunners of true knitting as we now know it, but modern, Knitted socks are close enough. Although none of the above mentioned excavated examples were patterned, with Sprang, at least, it is possible to create quite intricate designs, and as the knee socks of traditional Scandinavian folk costume were always patterned, it's a fairly safe bet that some, at least, of the Viking Age were so decorated, at least the 'Sunday best' of rich merchants. However, most peoples socks would have been of natural wool shades, or dyed a single colour. We know that wearing red socks, for instance, was meant to bring luck. The aforementioned sock from the Walmgate bar was decorated with two bands of tablet woven braid, one at the ankle the other at the top.

Perhaps the most common form of lower leg wear in the N.F.P.S. is the old faithful fur legging. These would certainly have been worn in winter, against the cold, but I don't really think they would have been all that prevalent at other times. However, they may have been worn by fighting men as some sort of defence against blows from spear shafts or the like, and they certainly add to the barbaric look, if done properly. They should not be too hairy, or too neatly cut for that matter. Avoid fake fur like the plague, and white sheepskin, remember, was rare in Viking times. If overdone, they can look quite ridiculous, and not everyone can carry them off successfully.

All through the Viking age, crossgartering of trousers, while by no means universal was popular for purely practical reasons. As well as giving support while walking, it stopped loose trouser legs getting caught up in shrubs and branches or the annoyance of wet or muddy trousers flapping round your legs. Best thing I've found is three yards per leg of plain, woolen braid as sold in most haberdashers, or fairly thin suede strip. Leather of any thickness is not recommended, as it will unfasten itself and could trip you up. An alternative to crossgartering, popular amongst Franks and English of the time to judge by contemporary manuscripts, are cloth puttees, wrapped from ankle to knee.

A long 'bandage' of woolen cloth is best for this.

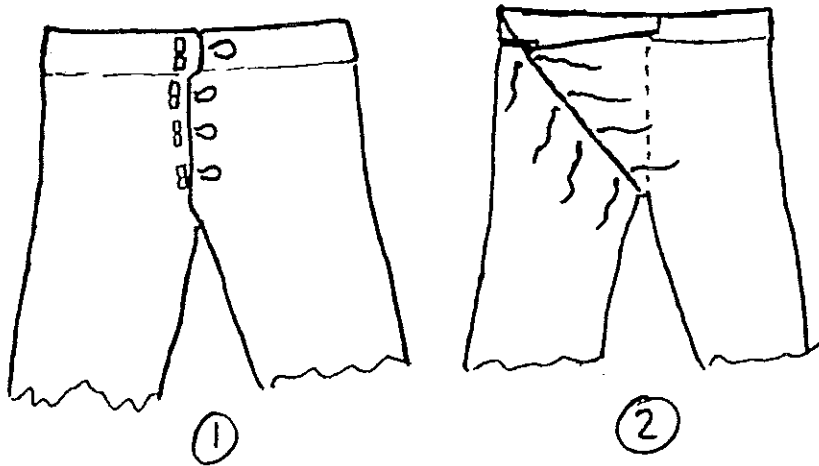
JUST A SMALL ADDITION TO ORM'S ARTICLE FROM GEOFF.

This is a quick addition for those whose tailoring skill is almost nil. Use an old pair of good fitting pants that still have some life left in them as a base. Use either large sections or patches of suitable material and sew them directly on to the pants until they are completely covered. Wool cloth-leather-suede or fur are the best materials, with cloth especially you should fold under the edges of patches before sewing to prevent fraying.

Pin patches/sections to pants before sewing and use matching material or you will look like a walking chess board. Use a carpet thread or some other heavy duty thread or it will not last, and you can use an overstich method that will sew both edges of pieces butting together at the same time.

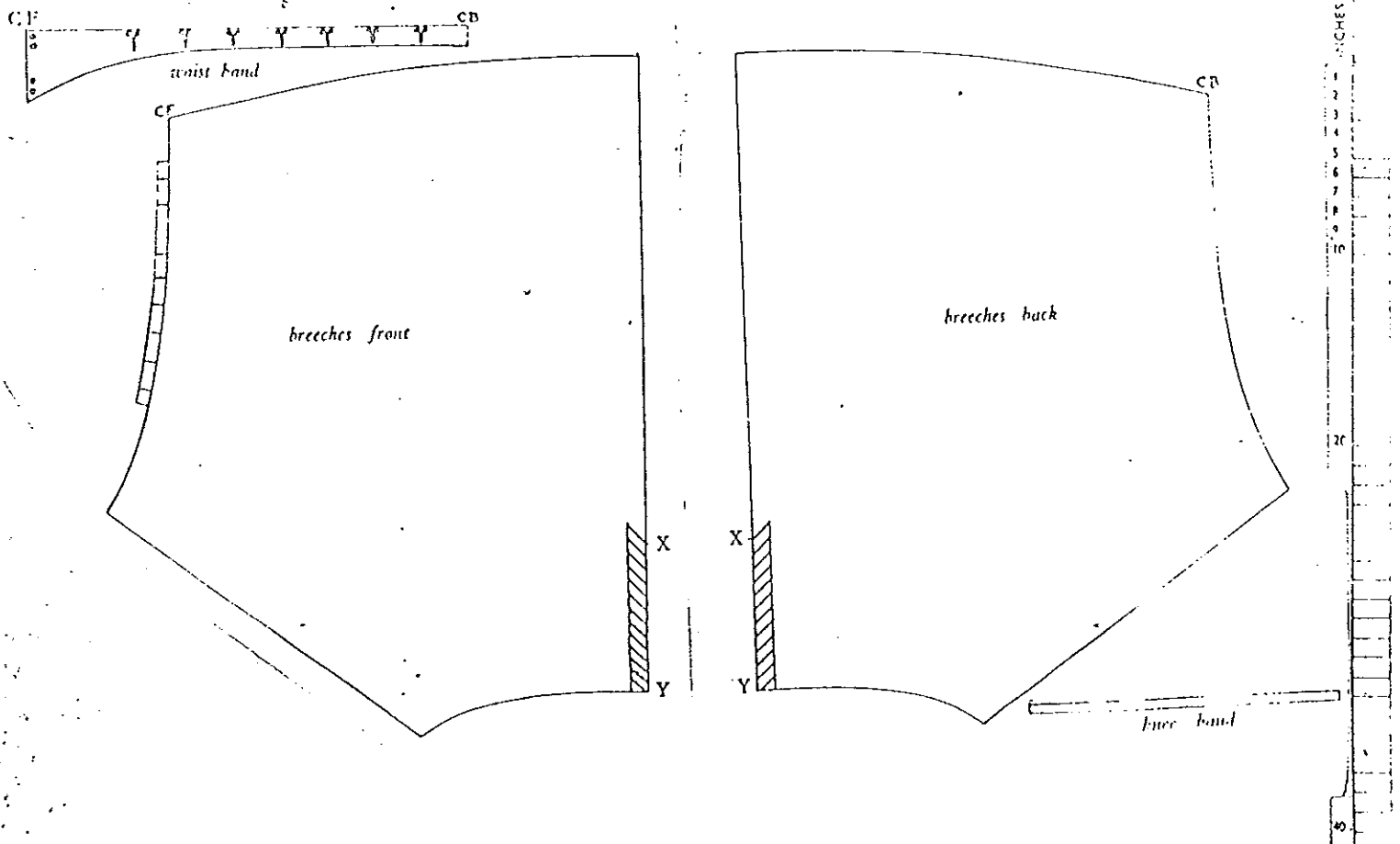
keep the stiches as neat and close together as possible and don't make the patches too small. You can work out patch/section sizes by chalking squares on pants to be used.

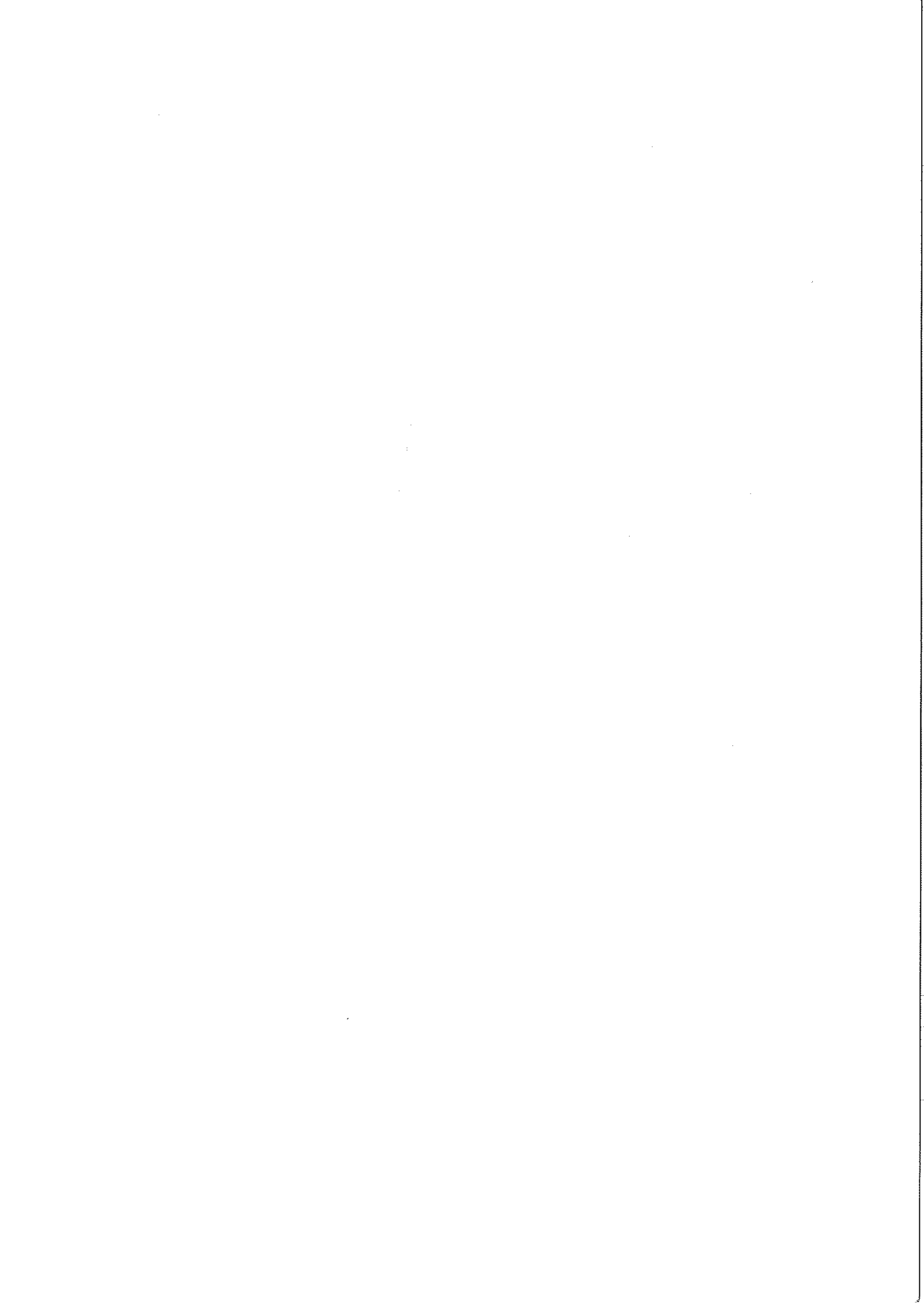
GOOD LUCK SVEN.



Methods of trouser closure.  
 1. Shows toggles and loops.  
 2. Triangular flap added, with tape-strings sewn in as ties.

PATTERN FOR 'GOTLAND SLOPS' BAGGY KNEE BREECHES.





Some of the Runes had, by the 9th century acquired the sounds of other Runes and can thus be freely interchanged; M & X for the sounds (ē & ā), X & φ for the half vowel (y) - not to be confused with (ÿ or ŷ) which equal (ī & ī) respectively.

So, good luck with the Runes, think (fōnetikəly) and don't hang up.

NB, if anyone has a deeper interest in the Runes that I have covered in this article, I will be pleased to discuss any point at length.

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Codex Otho BX Runes - as popularized in many modern works	Codex Otho BX Runes - facsimile	Codex Otho Runes - corrected forms with approximate modern english phonetic counterparts.
<p>                     A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z                      ᚠ ᚢ ᚣ ᚤ ᚥ ᚦ ᚧ ᚨ ᚩ ᚪ ᚫ ᚬ ᚭ ᚮ ᚯ ᚰ ᚱ ᚲ ᚳ ᚴ ᚵ ᚶ ᚷ ᚸ ᚹ ᚺ ᚻ ᚼ ᚽ ᚾ ᚿ ᛀ ᛁ ᛂ ᛃ ᛄ ᛅ ᛆ ᛇ ᛈ ᛉ ᛊ ᛋ ᛌ ᛍ ᛎ ᛏ ᛐ ᛑ ᛒ ᛓ ᛔ ᛕ ᛖ ᛗ ᛘ ᛙ ᛚ ᛛ ᛜ ᛝ ᛞ ᛟ ᛠ ᛡ ᛢ ᛣ ᛤ ᛥ ᛦ ᛧ ᛨ ᛩ ᛪ ᛫ ᛬ ᛭ ᛮ ᛯ ᛰ ᛱ ᛲ ᛳ ᛴ ᛵ ᛶ ᛷ ᛸ ᛹ ᛺ ᛻ ᛼ ᛽ ᛾ ᛿ ᚰ ᚱ ᚲ ᚳ ᚴ ᚵ ᚶ ᚷ ᚸ ᚹ ᚺ ᚻ ᚼ ᚽ ᚾ ᚿ ᛀ ᛁ ᛂ ᛃ ᛄ ᛅ ᛆ ᛇ ᛈ ᛉ ᛊ ᛋ ᛌ ᛍ ᛎ ᛏ ᛐ ᛑ ᛒ ᛓ ᛔ ᛕ ᛖ ᛗ ᛘ ᛙ ᛚ ᛛ ᛜ ᛝ ᛞ ᛟ ᛠ ᛡ ᛢ ᛣ ᛤ ᛥ ᛦ ᛧ ᛨ ᛩ ᛪ ᛫ ᛬ ᛭ ᛮ ᛯ ᛰ ᛱ ᛲ ᛳ ᛴ ᛵ ᛶ ᛷ ᛸ ᛹ ᛺ ᛻ ᛼ ᛽ ᛾ ᛿                 </p>	<p>                     ᚠ ᚢ ᚣ ᚤ ᚥ ᚦ ᚧ ᚨ ᚩ ᚪ ᚫ ᚬ ᚭ ᚮ ᚯ ᚰ ᚱ ᚲ ᚳ ᚴ ᚵ ᚶ ᚷ ᚸ ᚹ ᚺ ᚻ ᚼ ᚽ ᚾ ᚿ ᛀ ᛁ ᛂ ᛃ ᛄ ᛅ ᛆ ᛇ ᛈ ᛉ ᛊ ᛋ ᛌ ᛍ ᛎ ᛏ ᛐ ᛑ ᛒ ᛓ ᛔ ᛕ ᛖ ᛗ ᛘ ᛙ ᛚ ᛛ ᛜ ᛝ ᛞ ᛟ ᛠ ᛡ ᛢ ᛣ ᛤ ᛥ ᛦ ᛧ ᛨ ᛩ ᛪ ᛫ ᛬ ᛭ ᛮ ᛯ ᛰ ᛱ ᛲ ᛳ ᛴ ᛵ ᛶ ᛷ ᛸ ᛹ ᛺ ᛻ ᛼ ᛽ ᛾ ᛿                 </p>	<p>                     (ū &amp; ah) as in <u>up</u> and <u>fa</u>ther                      (ā &amp; ī, j) as in <u>ha</u>t and <u>ai</u>le, <u>Sly</u>                      (b) as in <u>bi</u>rd and <u>ho</u>bbit                      (ch) as in <u>chi</u>n and <u>na</u>tural                      (d) as in <u>do</u>g and <u>pu</u>lled                      (ē &amp; ā) as in <u>me</u>t and <u>ma</u>te                      (f &amp; v) as in <u>fa</u>ce and <u>gi</u>ve                      (g) as in <u>gr</u>een and <u>gh</u>ost                      (h) as in <u>he</u>el and <u>wh</u>o                      (ī, j &amp; ē) as in <u>si</u>t, <u>Sil</u>ly and <u>se</u>ed                      (k) as in <u>oa</u>k and <u>ca</u>r                      (l) as in <u>li</u>e and <u>ba</u>ll                      (m) as in <u>me</u>et and <u>li</u>mb                      (n) as in <u>si</u>n and <u>kn</u>ife                      (ō &amp; aω, ô &amp; ô) as in <u>no</u>t and <u>ba</u>rd, and <u>to</u>ne                      (p) as in <u>pe</u>el and <u>stopp</u>ed                      (kw) as in <u>qu</u>ick and <u>ch</u>oir                      (r) as in <u>ca</u>r and <u>wro</u>te                      (s &amp; z) as in <u>se</u>e and <u>pr</u>ize                      (t) as in <u>tea</u> and <u>stopp</u>ed                      (ō &amp; o) as in <u>to</u>ok and <u>too</u>l                      (w) as in <u>wi</u>n and <u>wri</u>te                      (ks) as in <u>bo</u>x and <u>so</u>cks                      (y) as in <u>ye</u>t                      (ū) as in <u>fu</u>el and <u>ye</u>s                      io (īō &amp; ēō) not really used in modern english                      (ng g) as in <u>si</u>ngle                      (st) as in <u>stoo</u>d                      (th &amp; dh) as in <u>th</u>in and <u>oth</u>er                      eo (ēō &amp; āō) not really used in modern english                      ea (āū &amp; īū) not really used in modern english                 </p> <p>sometimes:                      ↓ had the value (ī, j) as in <u>si</u>t or <u>si</u>lly</p>

THE NINTH CENTURY ANGLO-SAXON RUNES; A LAYMAN'S GUIDE.

by Russ & Jay Scott.

During the short time with which I have been involved in the N.F.P.S. I have been witness to many changes - particularly those in the field of authenticity. One aspect of this has been sadly neglected, though it should be a most important one to a Viking Society, that of the Runes, much that is written today is either couched in unitelligible terms which are confusing to the layman, or else oversimplified in terms that would upset even Noddy.

It is not the purpose of this or any future article to convert the would-be scorer of Runes to the intricacies of them, but rather to clear away some of the misconceptions, secrets, and downright deceptions that some would cloak them in. I would like to present to the layman in simple terms the basic concepts of the Runes, whether they are used as such is up to the individual, my task is merely to give them the information.

In the first column of the enclosed table, I have set out the Runes as they appear in many contemporary works. This list has been copied so many times from the original that many errors have crept in.

In the second column, I have traced the Runes from the original copy. Notice that there is no  $\wedge$  (v) Rune, as this is a simple variant of  $\bar{N}$  the ( $\bar{oo}$ ) Rune. Similarly with the  $\Psi$  (x) and  $\Upsilon$  (z) Runes. Although the Runes in the second column are vastly more authentic, they are of little more use to us than those in column one. For a start, they were written down in the 10th century, poorly copied by a latin Cleric, little versed in Rune lore, again copied from a copy of a copy. Secondly, the Runes are accompanied by their Anglo-Saxon - letters - not their modern English counterparts.

In the third column, I have reconstructed the correct the correct forms of each Rune, from archaeological as well as literary evidence. With each Rune I have given the approximate modern English sound, in the form used by the Oxford English Dictionary - CED, (Note that not all modern English dictionaries use the same OED designated sounds.) An example is given with each.

The first thing that should be realised, is that several of the Runes have more than one sound, and can be quite legitimately used as such. For example;  $\mathcal{F}$  can represent both the (f) and (v) sounds. Secondly, it must be realised that the Runes have only "phonetic" equivalents, rather than alphabetic" ones with modern English, and as modern English is a largely non-phonetic language, this causes a lot of problems. Note how we use a lot of silent letters; ghost, sword, etc Do not use a Rune for these. Notice also how we use double letters for one sound Hobbit, stopped, etc. Double Runes were never used in this way, use only one Rune per sound.

Finally, note how we write the same sound in many different ways; car, account, character, acke, back, acquaint, biscuit, kill, and liquor all spell the sound (k). One sound does not even have a Runic equivalent (j). Phonetically, this sound is "d+z", therefore ligature a  $\mathcal{M} + \mathcal{Y}$  Runes to make this sound, giving  $\mathcal{MY}$ .



by Peter Grettinsson of Northumbria

There are plenty of examples in the Sagas of one Viking inviting another and his entourage to stay for the winter. Apart from drinking, eating and more drinking, what did the Norse people do to pass their leisure hours?

The Germanic tribes had a reputation throughout the Roman world for obessional gambling, and from the archaeological evidence it seems that the Vikings inherited this trait. The dig at York has recovered many dice, of the same style as modern ones, made from bone or jet. Another game, still played and commercially available, was Hnefatafl, or Kings table. This was a board game for two players, not dissimilar to Fox and Geese, in which one side occupied the centre of the board and had to force their way to the edge of the board with their 'King' piece. The opposition's aim was to capture that King. Several variants existed, an Irish 10th century board had 49 squares, 7 X 7, while a damaged board discovered at York had 15 squares up one side. Playing pieces were made of various materials in several styles; those from York were made of chalk or antler, the two materials distinguishing the two teams, while a set from Valsgarde in Sweden were coloured glass, like marbles. Numbers of pieces varied, probably with board size, from eight to twelve a side, plus a distinctive King piece. Although other board games existed; the gaming board from the Gokstad ship was marked out for two different games, one on each side, it is doubtfull if chess was known in its present form.

To amuse themselves through the long inclement winters learned men would relate the sagas, oral traditions of their famous ancestors, modified to suit the tastes and prejudices of the audience, no doubt, and spiced with added intrigue, myth and magic. Poetry was a special skill, as it was bound by strict rules, which resulted in a rich and complex poetic form, and created an elite of skilled poets, the bulk of whom, for some unexplained reason, were Icelanders. Kennings, cryptic metaphors often employed to replace a single mundane word, made the audience think as well as enjoying the rhyme and metre of the poem.

Few musical instruments from the Viking age have been found, but simple whistles made from birds legbones are known, and a set of pan-pipes was found at York, along with the bridge of a six-string lyre. Just what Norse music or dance was like, though is unclear, but have a look at how the Faroe Islanders dance, it may give a clue.

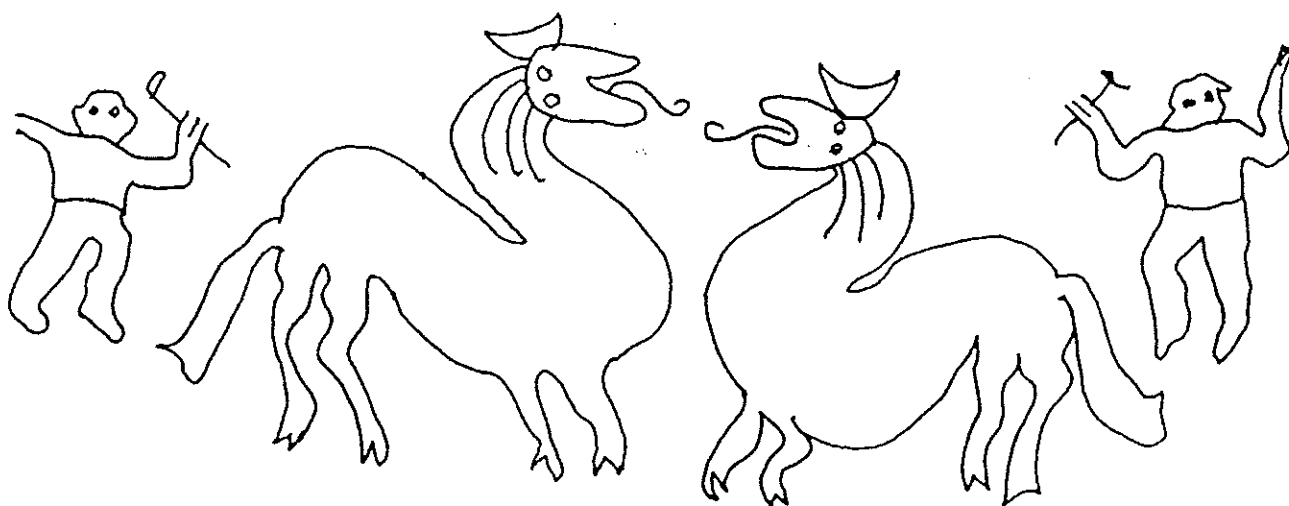
More physical indoor sports included wrestling, as recorded on several stone sculptures, and in the Norse mythology there is the famous story of Thor's bout with the ancient woman, 'Old Age'. A particularly dangerous pass-time was the strength test known as 'Knot lifting'. One man would try and stand from a kneeling position with a second man hanging round his neck! Although this could easily result in a crippling injury, or even death, it was not considered as a serious contest. Fighting, which was considered serious, with weapons, was not normally allowed at feasts, so protagonists would go outside, out of view, to 'urinate together'. (Tut, Tut, Peter, B.B.)

Outdoors more energetic sports were possible, even in winter. Skates made of bone, held on by a simple ankle strap and the weight of the skater, were used for sport as well as for transport. A 12th account of young men skating for sport near London,

describes how iron-tipped poles were used to propel the skaters at high speeds, towards each other, and then lifted to use like a lance to upset the opposing jouster. Horses were pitted against each other for sport, either racing or fighting. In Njal's saga a horse fight between two stallions owned by Gunnar and Starkad drew a large crowd, and the two owners encouraged their horses with goads. Competitions of this sort where property as well as honour was at stake, would not be entered into lightly, and might even have been part of a feud, boosting the reputation of the victor. A sport similar to ice hockey seems to have been played, using skates, club and wooden 'ball'. but it seems that the clubs were not only used on the ball but also on the opposition players!

Two modern games of Viking origin are still played in Sweden. One is varpa, a game which involves tossing rocks at a stake in the ground, much like in the game horse-shoes. There are clubs in Gotland which keep this sport alive. Another sporting relic from the Viking age is stangstorting, not dissimilar to the Scottish caber toss, but the beam is launched from a squatting position, and is powered by the thrust of both arms and legs.

Perhaps as exponents of living archaeology we ought to try some of these Viking pastimes, and not restrict ourselves (too much) to the drinking.



HORSE FIGHTING - HAGGEBY STONE, UPPLAND.

